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FILE ONLY

Kidnaping Victim Returns to U.S.

J By Barbara Vobejda
Washington Post Staff Writer

Television journalist Jeremy Levin, who was kidnaped 11 months ago in Lebanon, told about 50 friends and relatives who welcomed him back to American soil yesterday, that he holds no ill feeling toward his captors.

Levin, accompanied by his wife Lucille and two children, appeared pale, but was smiling as he stepped off the Air Force C135 transport plane at Andrews Air Force Base waving a small American flag:

"My former captors, I want you to know I'm not bitter. I'm not angry. But I am glad to be free," said Levin, Beirut bureau chief for Cable News Network before his capture by Moslem militants last March. Levin, 52, urged that four other Americans believed held in Lebanon be released.

His voice shook with emotion several times during a short statement to reporters, as he expressed his relief at being free.

Addressing his remarks to all Americans, Levin said, "Boy, I missed you." He called himself a "born-again American," and said his experience had been an "inward journey" that left him deeply religious.

Levin, who had shaved the beard he grew in captivity, arrived from Frankfurt, Germany, where he and his wife were reunited last Saturday. Many of those who greeted him waved yellow streamers reminiscent of the welcome for the American hostages after their release from Iran.

The Levins did not go to their Northwest Washington home after leaving Andrews with a police escort, but headed for a secluded "hideaway," where the veteran journalist will have an opportunity to rest, according to an official at CNN, which helped orchestrate the brief ceremony yesterday.

Judy Borza, public relations director at the network, said when Levin is ready to return to work, he will be assigned temporarily to Washington or Atlanta.

Levin was greeted by a delegation from the Air Force and the State Department, including Assistant Secretary of State Kenneth Dam, who pledged to continue to work for the release of the remaining captives. The four Americans

missing or kidnaped in West Beirut in the last year are William Buckley, a U.S. diplomat; the Rev. Benjamin Weir, a Presbyterian minister; Peter Kilburn, a librarian at American University of Beirut, and the Rev. Lawrence Jenco, from the Catholic Relief Service office in Beirut.

In his remarks, Levin said his freedom was a good omen for the other captives, but urged: "Let my brothers go."

He praised those, including many Syrians, he said, who had worked for his release, "while I literally sat in dark and gloom, a prisoner in irons and misery."

Levin, who has been quoted as saying he was held alone and sometimes blindfolded, gave no further description of his experience as a hostage.

Also, there was no new information to determine whether Levin escaped or was freed by his captors, according to State Department spokeswoman Sondra McCarty. While Levin has said that he escaped from his captors Wednesday night, some State Department officials have suggested he may have been allowed to escape because of growing pressure from several countries and private citizens.